



Briefing Room Q&As

2010 Pesticide Data Program Annual Summary

Q: What are the main conclusions from the 2010 annual Pesticide Data Program report? Should I continue eating fruits and vegetables?

A: Our annual report shows that overall pesticide residues found on foods tested are at levels below the tolerances set by the EPA. The data reported by PDP corroborate that residues found in fruit and vegetables are at levels that do not pose risk to consumers' health (i.e., are safe according to EPA). Health and nutrition experts encourage the consumption of fruits and vegetables in every meal as part of a healthy diet, and this is affirmed in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans released last year and My Plate, the federal nutrition graphic, that shows that people should fill half their plate with fruits and vegetables.

Q: What is the purpose of this report? What is the value derived from it?

A: The pesticide data that USDA publishes each year provides regulators, scientists, farmers, and consumers with important insights into ongoing challenges, as well as information on significant progress in the use of pesticides. EPA uses Pesticide Data Program data to conduct dietary risk assessments and to ensure that any pesticide residues in foods remain at safe levels. The data is used by USDA to better understand the relationship of pesticide residues to agriculture practices and enhance USDA's Integrated Pest Management objectives. USDA also shares PDP data with our trading partners to demonstrate the safety of U.S. exports. The results indicate that in general, growers continue to prefer to use the newer, safer pesticides as opposed to older pesticides that pose higher risk.

Q: How many samples were taken? What were the results?

A: PDP tested a total of 10,974 samples of fresh and processed fruit and vegetables (including 574 of baby food), 299 oat samples, 371 egg samples, 384 catfish samples, 250 potable groundwater samples, and 567 treated and untreated drinking water samples. The 2010 report was the first time that PDP tested mangoes, cabbage, hot peppers, and baby food (green beans, pears and sweet potatoes). Data is collected in a variety of states and throughout the year such that the samples are representative of the entire US. The 2010 data report shows that when pesticide residues are found on foods, they are nearly always at levels below the tolerances set by the EPA. Excluding water and catfish, residues exceeding the established tolerance were detected in 0.25 percent of the samples. While the levels were low and below the tolerance for approved commodities, 4.6 percent of the samples had residues with no established tolerance for the specific commodity tested. For baby food – included for the first time in this report – the data showed that no residues were found that exceeded the tolerance levels. Some residues were found with no established tolerance levels but the extremely low levels of those residues are not a food safety risk, and the presence of such residues does not pose a safety concern.



Q: Is baby food safe for my child?

A: Yes. Based on the data from AMS – and on EPA's assessment that the small amount of pesticides found in a few of the samples present no health risk – FDA has no reason to conclude that baby foods are in any way unsafe. Parents and caregivers can continue to feed infants their regular baby foods.

While six samples (three baby food green beans and three baby food pears) had residues of pesticides for which no tolerance has been established by EPA for those commodities, the levels of pesticide detected did not exceed the safety levels for other commodities. Specifically:

- Three samples of baby food green beans had residues of propamocarb hydrochloride, a fungicide with no tolerance established because it is not approved for use in green beans. The range of values detected was from 0.010 to 0.022 ppm¹.
- Three samples of baby food pears had residues of iprodione, a fungicide with no tolerance established because it is not allowed for use in pears. The range of values detected was from 0.014 to 0.21 ppm.
- These two pesticides are allowed for use in several other crops. For example, the EPA tolerances for iprodione in grapes and lettuce are 60 and 25 parts per million, respectively. Similarly, the EPA tolerances for propamocarb hydrochloride in lettuce and cucumbers are 90 and 1.5 parts per million, respectively. Although the baby food samples had extremely low levels compared to these tolerances, they were technically still tolerance violations.

Q: Is baby food still being tested? Does USDA have results from tests done in 2011?

A: Yes. In 2011, PDP continued testing commodities that were part of the 2010 program, including baby food (green beans, pears, sweet potatoes). In January 2012, PDP initiated testing of baby food carrots and baby food peaches, and commodities planned for inclusion in the summer of 2012 include applesauce baby food and peas baby food. While the raw data has already been shared with EPA and FDA, USDA is currently just beginning work on collating and analyzing the data for the 2011 report.

Q: What has FDA done to address these violations in baby food and other commodities?

A: It is important to remember that no residues were found in baby food that exceeded established tolerances, and extremely low residues for which no tolerance was established were found in only 6 samples. These levels did not exceed tolerances levels for other commodities that have established tolerances

¹ As a point of reference, 1 ppm is equivalent to one drop of water diluted into 50 liters (roughly the fuel tank capacity of a compact car), or about 32 seconds out of a year. One ppm is like one inch in 16 miles, one second in 11.5 days, one minute in two years, or one car in bumper-to-bumper traffic from Cleveland to San Francisco. 1 ppb is equivalent to one drop of water diluted into 250 chemical drums (50 m³), or about three seconds out of a century. One ppb is like one sheet in a roll of toilet paper stretching from New York to London.



for the pesticides detected. FDA evaluated the information and, in consultation with EPA, determined there was no immediate health risk. Since then, FDA has met with the manufacturers of the violative products to inform them of the findings and the fact that products containing illegal pesticides cannot be allowed on the market. In addition, the FDA has used the PDP results to guide further investigation and begun the process of collecting and analyzing additional samples of baby food to check pesticide residue levels and determine if any prohibited residues are present.

Also, as a result of the USDA findings, FDA is conducting additional regulatory monitoring of cilantro and watermelon for illegal pesticide residues, including sampling at growers, packers, and importers identified by the USDA violations.

Q: What is a tolerance level? How does EPA set a tolerance level?

A: A tolerance is the maximum amount of a pesticide residue allowable on a raw agricultural commodity. If a pesticide is used on food crops, EPA sets a tolerance or maximum residue level of the pesticide that can remain in or on foods. In setting the tolerance, EPA evaluates hazard and exposure data to assess risk to human health and the environment for requested uses. EPA is required to make a safety finding for the pesticide that accounts for exposure through various food items, water, and home environments. PDP data is a critical component of EPA's dietary assessments of pesticide exposure.

EPA uses PDP data for its ongoing evaluation of pesticide tolerances to ensure that the levels set by EPA meet the safety standards prescribed by the law. EPA has cancelled or modified uses for various pesticide registrations based on PDP data. Furthermore, the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) of 1996 mandated periodic review of all registered pesticides. Through the Agency's registration review program, all pesticides distributed and sold in the United States must be registered by EPA based on scientific data showing that they will not cause unreasonable risks to human health, workers, or the environment when used as directed on product labeling. The registration review program ensures that, as the ability to assess risk evolves and as policies and practices change, all registered pesticides continue to meet the statutory standard of no unreasonable adverse effects.